

HUD's Crime Prevention Program

Lynn A. Curtis, PhD

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers a 13-agency program of crime prevention targeted on the largest and most crime-ridden public housing projects around the country.

Homicide is the result of causal factors that the Presidential Crime and Violence Commissions of the 1960s addressed: blocked economic opportunities, relative deprivation, family breakdown, and institutional racism. These basic causes still operate today.

What can be done? There are criminal justice responses: handgun control, police teams trained to handle domestic quarrels, victim-witness programs, and the separation in prison of youths convicted of relatively minor offenses from hardened criminals. Although such criminal justice approaches are important, they deal chiefly with symptoms rather than causes. The structural problems remain: how to create full employment, improve the economic position of blacks, and eliminate institutional racism. Traditional Keynesian "trickle down" economic policies have not worked. And the new supply side conservative economics is even less sensitive to the needs of minorities. An alternative "bubble-up" economic policy carefully targeted to neighborhoods, however, may prove successful.

The neighborhood approach is one of the bases for the HUD anticrime program. Minority consultants from the American Institutes for Research (a private think tank in Washington, D.C.) first searched the literature to find what approaches had and had not worked to prevent crime in and around public housing. Tenants in housing projects across the country were asked their opinions about what should be done. Public housing executives and criminologists were consulted. From these conferences a conceptual framework involving seven areas was developed:

1. Improvement of the management of the public safety throughout a public housing project.
2. Improvement of the physical safety of the buildings and environmental design.
3. Organization of the tenants—giving them funds to fight crimes in the ways that they choose. This step is really the core of the program.
4. Employment of youths—a recognition that there is a relationship between unemployment and crime.
5. Comprehensive special services to reduce crime, ranging from prevention of juvenile delinquency and of alcohol and drug abuse to victim-witness services and programs for the elderly.
6. Improved police protection in projects, including use of domestic quarrel and conflict resolution teams and youths working with police in team policing.
7. Cooperative, local-level partnerships in which the city and the private sector target resources not only on the public housing project but also on the neighborhood surrounding it.

The essence of the anticrime program is to facilitate self-help. An important facet is the creative, integrated use of jobs from the Department of Labor (DOL) and money from

the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, ADAMHA, and DOL. The program's managers are trying to answer questions that Nathan Caplan's research at the University of Michigan raised about why some of the brightest youths in DOL JOBS I and JOBS II training programs dropped out just before they were about to move into the work force (1, 2).

One of the most promising public housing models is the House of Umoja in Philadelphia, where David and Falaka Fattah, parents of six sons, invited 15 tough, alienated members of neighborhood gangs to live with them as members of an extended family for a year (3). They instilled pride in the boys by emphasizing the African concept of the extended family through which all members lend each other support. The House does not isolate the boys from the community; in fact, there is strong emphasis on community services. The House now provides a variety of neighborhood programs for children, elderly citizens, and local businesses, and is rehabilitating a whole block of row houses, teaching skills to the boys in the process.

Part of the Umoja model might be difficult to implement in other public housing because the success in Philadelphia has depended on the Fattahs. But the basic ideas—emphasis on indigenous community processes, installation of self-pride, creation of unity, and generation of meaningful employment—are important.

What does a mental health program really mean in a West Philadelphia slum or a huge public housing project? Treatment directed at the neuroses of whites is hardly relevant to situations like these. Techniques that build on community self-help can do much to combat black homicide.

References

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Advocacy for Life: Mandates, Models, and Priorities for Prevention

Bertha G. Holliday, PhD

Black homicide should be given a priority in expending ADAMHA's prevention funds. Black homicide is imbedded in the day-to-day reality of the black community. ADAMHA has a legislative mandate to support research, demonstration projects, and dissemination efforts related to alcohol and drug abuse and mental health; alcohol and drugs figure in the majority of black homicides. Homicides have emotionally stressful antecedents and consequences, and homicide is the ultimate antithesis of health promotion and human resource development.

Existing theories and data on crime and homicide are compatible with ADAMHA's increasing emphasis on developmental, ecological, and transactional processes. The multiple aspects of black homicide encompass the criminal justice